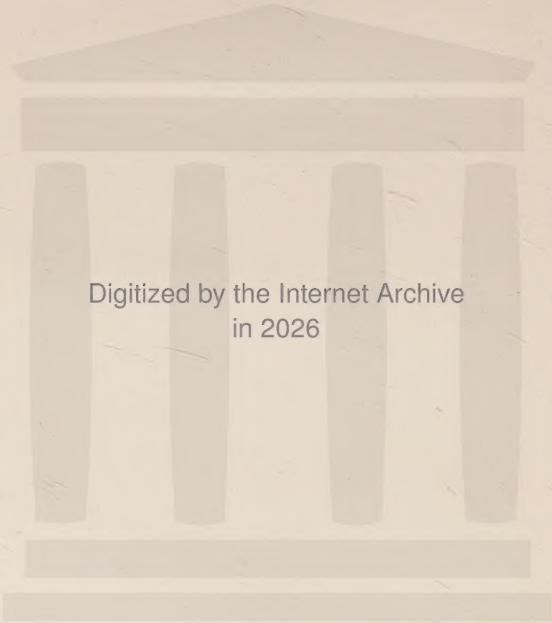
Library
of the
San Francisco College for Women

Gift of
Joseph M. Gleason

St pc

Bibliophily
or
Booklove


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/bibliophilyorboo0000jame

BIBLIOPHILY
OR
BOOKLOVE

BY
JAMES F. WILLIS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO.
MDCCCCXXI

992
.W73

46837

COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY JAMES F. WILLIS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TO

S. R. C.

AND

C. A. L.

LOYAL AND STEADFAST

CONTENTS

I. Booklove 1

II. Books 9

III. Great Books 20

IV. Book-Gathering 29

V. Book-Reading 46

VI. Book-Making 68

BIBLIOPHILY

I

BOOKLOVE

It is *booklove* that enables us to perceive whatever is true and beautiful in books, and it is a passport to the purest and the perfectest pleasures possible to men. We are never *really* well-bred until we have attained ability to *know* and to *love* real books: it is almost all a matter of education — of *self*-education; and the completer the culture, the deeper-rooted the appreciation and the greater the influence. Booklove is a mark of refinement, and we are only fractions of men without it. Frederic Faber says, "Booklove has broadened many a narrow soul; many a close, stifled, unwindowed heart has it filled with mountain-air and sunshine, thus making room for God and man where there was no room before." Next to

the poet, the booklover is the richest and the happiest of men, however humble his station may be: it keeps him from vulgar company and pastimes, and is the most efficacious means for attaining all the amenities of culture. We marvel at the breeding and the scholarship of the men of three centuries ago, and at the dignity of their expression; but it is all mainly attributable to their booklove: they did not keep the company of so *many* books as we; but they kept *better* company, understood them better, and loved them as friends: their manners were courtly, and there is dignity in both their diction and their phrasing because "they lunched with Plutarch and supped with Plato." By their very occupation, booklovers as well as booksellers are *broad*-minded: their constant companionship with books gives them a liberality through which they view clearly and dispassionately every phase of life and every dispensation of Providence; they are not always what the world knows as *practical*,

for *spiritual* development seldom produces dexterity in the baser organs. While booklove is not a *common* trait and lack of it is common even among collegians, there is no greater drawback for *soul*-education than to be born deaf to the persuasive influences of worthy books. No other friendship can quite equal that of the books through which our spiritual nature and our character have been advanced: Cicero preferred to part with all he owned rather than not be permitted to live and die among his books: Bishop Fénelon said that not for an empire would he part with his books or his booklove: that master-historian Gibbon said that booklove meant more to him than all the riches of The Indies: Macaulay preferred to be a beggar with a love for books than to be a millionaire without them: when Scott returned to Abbotsford to die and was wheeled into his library, he burst into tears as he beheld those lifelong friends upon his bookshelves: when Southey's intellect failed and he was no

longer able to read, he would walk about his bookshelves gently stroking or caressing those friends of his happier days.

Booklove supplies each day and each hour with an endless stream of independent and rational pleasure, and we need not hope for anything really worthy of a Christian or an American from the man who does not at times love to stay in his own room in the ennobling company of the great men who live in books. We all are made or marred by the company we keep, whether of men or of books. No darkness from without can ever obscure the light and the sweetness within, which is forever the portion of the man who loves books. Washington Irving says that it is only the booklover who knows how dear these silent yet eloquent companions of pure thoughts and innocent hours become in the time of adversity — when worldly things grow drossy, when friends grow cold and intimates become vapidly civil and commonplace. Next to the glory of *writing* a

worthy book is a taste for the dainties among books, a discernment in appreciating good books, and a hunger for collecting them. It is the caprice of vulgarians to sneer at him who inclines toward making books the chief of his friends, to surround himself with them, and to live happy in their midst: perhaps it is because they feel that his choice is a reflection upon their cheaper tastes that they square themselves by dubbing him *bibliomane* — book-mad; Ruskin observes that they do not call the vulgarian house-buyer or horse-buyer *house*-mad or *horse*-mad.

It is by being in the presence of books from childhood that a love for them is unconsciously acquired; and, in a child's evolution, the library is a far more important place than the nursery: whoever is not a booklover before he reaches manhood shall hardly attain it afterward — disuse atrophies this power. Dr. Holmes says that all men are afraid of books who have not tumbled about among them from infancy; they may not

read the greatest among them while growing to man's stature, but virtue passes through their parchment and leather garments whenever they touch them, as the precious drug sweated through the handle of the bat in the Arabian story: such men are always *at home* wherever they smell the invigorating fragrance of Russia or Morocco; and few that are otherwise built ever seem *at home* in a library—the beginning of booklove is oftener an endowment than an acquirement.

To become entirely worthy of our American manhood, we must *live* among books and live *lovingly* among them: the soul of man has nowhere else so stamped his image as in this world of books; and, to be fair of head and heart, we *must* find a home within this world. The wants that books supply can be known only by living lovingly among them, and he always reverences them who thus lives among them. Every advancing soul quickly perceives the heritage he has in books; he is always most at ease in their

company, and always prepared to forego any other pleasure that he may dip into all the truth and the beauty that is held between the covers of some true book: it is only the sleepy or the dead soul that finds books a barren wilderness. The man who in these days has found no book to love is hardly worth knowing; he has no message for us that can in any way advance our character-side or incline us toward the noble things of life; in the things-of-the-soul, he has not risen above the peasant prior to Gutenberg—so, what's the use?!

The *plain*-people are the pillars of every democracy: what *they* are decides the strength or the weakness of our nation; and nothing can conduce more to their being *somebody* and to their doing *something*, than to help them early to become acquainted with the *good* and the *better* and the *best* among books, to inspire them to make books their steadfast friends and lifelong companions, and to establish in them the conviction that even illiteracy is preferable to *bad*, *worse*, *worst*

books. Next to inculcating patriotism and the spirit of our America, American teachers have no other task nearly so important as to create an understanding *of* and an appreciation *for* the books-that-*are*-books. Without booklove, any teacher is a menace to pupils —if he has not read, he *never* can infuse the spirit of *right*-reading.

II

BOOKS

He is the *blessed* man who lives a hidden and workful life, *nourished* by the love of one or two *really* worthy women and by the friendship of one or two real men, *devoted* to the practice of goodness, and to the search for the truth and the beauty of life through *books:* above all other things in the world, his books shall help him to discover *what* he is, *whither* he is going, *how* he is related to the world and his fellows.

The *supreme* aim of books is to help us to make the *most* of life, and men of *vision* use them mainly for this end. They are not a *luxury*, but an *essential* of life: what food is to the *body*, books are to the *soul;* and it is impossible to overrate them. Not all men have the *soul*-qualities to get the most out of books; but, for all that have adequately cultured soul-powers, it is among the chief of

their patriotic and religious duties to *know* them—to know them is to *love* them, and those who love both *live* right and *do* right. Towards making God's world a happier world, the printing-press has preceded platform and pulpit. Through the invention of printing, the *poorest* man may to-day own the *richest* books; and they are the Aladdin's Lamp that can turn his humble home into a prince's palace. The modern world is not spiritually superior to the ancient; but it *is* superior from its spiritual powers plus its heritage of two thousand years transmitted to it through books, which it never could have had but for the beneficent invention of printing: so, we can never think of Gutenberg without the utmost reverence and gratitude for his masterly invention.

How a man appreciates books is a test of his capacity for higher conduct and higher life. The noble books shall dignify us; the *ig*noble shall debauch us: whether they shall dignify or debauch depends upon our he-

redity and environment and education — especially upon our education. True books are as difficult to find as true men; bad and vulgar books are as obtrusive and as ubiquitous as bad and vulgar men. It is only an *alert* soul that can truly understand books-that-*are*-books, and become *soul*-enriched through them; it is only when our breeding both natural and ideal has enabled us to understand the language and the indispensable uses of books that we begin to grow in a big *manly* way. Mrs. Browning says, "Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush is afire with God; but only he who *sees* takes off his shoes." For *light* to perceive all this God and heaven in our midst and to profit from it, we must turn mainly to the books that thrill with *light* and *power*.

The man who does not keep book-company and does not keep improving his book-surroundings rarely yearns for intellectual and moral surroundings. To expect the vulgar to value the best in life and in books is

to expect what never has been: vulgarians are vulgar just because they are contented merely with what excites curiosity and affords amusement, or with what pleases one or another of their sensualities. Like everything else that is worth having, book-appreciation is a matter of education; and, for our highest interests, both college and church shall never be better employed than in inculcating the importance of keeping the company of *real* books and of improving book-surroundings. Our choice of books is always a test of our manhood and of our culture. A bad book corrupts even more easily and quickly than a bad man, for we will often listen to a bad book when we would spurn the talk of a bad man. Bad books are dangerous because the soul generally shrinks to the meaner company that gathers there to hatch conspiracies against our better-self: in all companionships, the lower tends to draw the higher down — we get courage and strength and gladness from looking *up*, seldom from look-

ing *down*. Whenever we are interested in an inferior book, our soul lives in an alley. The *good* book is a thing-of-beauty, and a thing-of-beauty is a thing-of-God: it inspires hope and courage, it leads to lofty simplicity and robust virtues, it refreshes and nourishes our soul by feeding it upon dainty and wholesome soul-food which is more abundant in a worthy *book* than *anywhere* else. The good book sustains us to endure life, and to get the best out of life; it breaks for us the poor hobble of everyday sights and sounds and habits and tasks which tether both our thinking and our feeling. Every other but a *worthy* book does something to *unman* us; all that a man should ever care for a book is just what it is worth to *him*. Trash shall not be produced when trash does not sell; and this shall come when literature shall be given its proper place in school, not only for soul-development, but also as a most easily-opened door to history and art and science and morals.

The books-that-*are*-books!! There is little gold in the book-mine to-day: it consists mainly of clay and stones! We, too, may complain with Charles Lamb that it moves our spleen to see things in *books'* clothing perched upon shelves like false saints, thrusting out the legitimate occupants—usurpers of true shrines, intruders into the sanctuary: to reach up hoping to find some Steele or some kind-hearted play-book, and come bolt upon some Adam Smith or some well-arranged assortment of blockheaded cyclopædias set forth in an array of Russia or Morocco, when a *tithe* of that good leather could comfortably clothe our shivering book-friends who have worn their raiment threadbare through devoted service to us. "I never see these impostors," says Lamb, "but I long to strip them and to clothe my ragged veterans in their spoils." Lowell says that in books we must not (like the sailors of Ulysses) take bags of wind for sacks of gold; or our little lifeboat shall soon be

driven far from our proper port by these winds, as was the unfortunate Ulysses.

It is the belief to-day that general *spiritual* culture far excels mere *intellectual* culture. Greek and Latin have always been serviceable for purposes of *intellectual* gymnastics; but, for general *spiritual* culture, modern literature surpasses both, and to-day not even the *moderately* wise think of burying themselves in a Greek or Latin urn, as did the scholars of The Renascence. English is the oldest and the ripest of all the modern literatures; and, along with The French, it has sustained a higher average of excellence for a longer time than other modern literatures, and has put into modern and Christian form the best that ancient and pagan literature ever had: whoever masters English literature unconsciously receives into his culture the substantial literary life of Palestine, Greece, and Rome. French books seem to have been written just for Paris; but we who speak the tongue of Shakespeare are heirs to a litera-

ture that has circled the earth with its music and messages — it seems to have been written for *all* the world. Greek was admirably adapted for literary purposes; but English is not one whit behind Greek for such purposes, even if it does lack economy and self-control. We shall be coming into our own when chief among American school-books shall be The Bible, Shakespeare and Tennyson, Scott and Fenimore-Cooper, Motley and Parkman, Emerson and Lowell. The Bible concerns itself with life, and literature is permeated with illustrations from it and allusions to it; without familiarity with The Bible, modern books are almost incomprehensible. In Shakespeare and Tennyson can be found all the materials for deep and genuine culture; and it is essential to know them for their poetic qualities and tender sentiments, and for their delightful diction and phrasing: it has been said that no modern life can be *full* unless a myriad of days and nights have been given to Shakespeare

—he is "our most rhythmic genius, our acutest intellect, our profoundest imagination, our healthiest understanding, who arrived at the full development of his powers at the moment when the material in which he worked (that wonderful composite called English) was in its freshest perfection." *Worthy* stories give imaginative pleasure; and they do the work of the stage, the pulpit, the philosopher, and the poet; yet, there is far too much that is deciduous about stories, little that is perennial, and a mountain with qualities that can never entitle them to rank as literature. We don't realize the greatness and the variety and the possibility of human-nature because our lens of human-nature interests is too contracted; *great* fiction broadens this lens perhaps more than all other things. Nobody can tell a story so well as the *best* of the story-tellers; with the Scotts and the Fenimore-Coopers as our story-tellers, we are on safe ground. Ideal history is a mixture of poetry and philoso-

phy; it is the divine Book of Revelation, and great men are its texts; it is mainly the biography of a few *imperial* men — of the world's *real* aristocrats upon whom the destiny of humanity always hangs and with whom all improvement begins. In the evolution of a patriotic American, history-influences are an essential: the better we Americans know history and sociology, the better we shall understand and appreciate The United States which has been called The Flower-of-The-Ages. A great man's biography has greater educational and inspirational value than the best story that has ever been written, or the best sermon that has ever been preached; and whoever intends to make the most of himself must know intimately the lives of a few great men, whether through history or biography, for there is no greater incentive to worthy living. Biography tells what *has* been done, what *can* be done, what *ought* to be done. Somebody says that autobiographies have been writ-

ten mainly by men who were more interesting to themselves than to other people; but Benvenuto Cellini, Benjamin Franklin, and John Woolman have left us classics in *their* autobiographies. Horace Greeley said that in all Franklin's achievements he deserved most and best from mankind for his "Autobiography"; Charles Lamb said that Woolman's "Journal" should be learned by heart.

III

GREAT BOOKS

It has been said that *modern* writing is largely a clamorous and turbulent stream dashing among the rocks of criticism, over the pebbles of the world's daily events, trying to make itself seen and heard amid the hoarse cries of politics and the rumbling wheels of traffic: a *classic* is a still lakelet, a mountain tarn fed by springs that never fail; its surface is never ruffled by storm, and it is always smiling a welcome to the visitor.

The *Great* Books make up the thing that the schools call *Literature*. The Great Books have been forged at the heart and fashioned by the head of Godlike men; they are the children of those whose life was a glorious service, and whose memory is a benediction; they are the embodiment of lives which were devoted to the meditation of truth and to the pursuit of beauty; they are the criticisms

of life made by those who were in *love* with life, and who had the deepest convictions about the possibilities of life. The Great Books are treasuries of golden thought in golden words, the storehouses of the world's spiritual riches, the worthiest and the most wonderful of all the things that have been made by men; they are caskets that contain the attar of head and heart, and of everything that is most enriching and ennobling; they are windows that discover boundless fields for soul-refreshment and for soul-expansion, and the looms which *rapidly* weave men's *inner* garments; they are hives of great and inspiring thought and true love, fountains of ideas and ideals, homes of all truth and beauty and love and light and power and freedom; they are the repositories of universal experience, the wisest advisers and the truest friends, perennial inspirers without whose light the world should still be in darkness.

What can these Great Books called *liter-*

ature do for us? It is their mission to *form* the intellect and *strengthen* the soul-powers: De Quincey calls the former *knowledge*-literature, and the latter *power*-literature. The Great Books have always come from the heart: their authors have written them because they could not help it: *little* men so often write just to *say* something; *big* men *never* write until they have something to say: the big men write what Thoreau calls "The Eternities"; the little men write what he calls "The Times." A great book is always better to know than a great man, for it is always the *best* part of some great man. To know the great *man* is not always to have an access of soul-power through knowing him: Hawthorne says that it is not for the best interests of the world to know too intimately the lives of its great men; but to know Great *Books* is to acquire soul-enrichment from each intercourse with them, yet to escape the compensatory weaknesses of their authors' genius. The majority of us are

from humble beginnings with an insufficiency of the breeding and the environment and the education that contribute to the amenities that entitle us to commingle with the *living* great men and women; hence, it is *only* through the Great Books that almost all of us can ever come to know *great* men and share their influences — and life can never be *complete* without the influences of the *best* society. Lowell says, "As thrills of long-hushed tones live in the viol, so our soul grows fine with keen vibrations from the touch divine of noble natures gone." In Great Books, great men talk to us, give us most precious thought in most precious language, and pour their souls into ours: by their ideas, they bring us *freedom;* and *through* their ideas, they bring us *expansion:* the lightning of their great thoughts and feelings shows us the way to heroic life, which we *never* can find by any other means. The Great Books are fatal to low standards, to self-complacency, to narrowness and dis-

honesty of every sort: they appeal to the best that is in us, and answer *our* demand for what is best: they give a voice to our own indistinct thoughts and to the things we are yearning for: through them we catch the spirit of the holiest and the wisest men that have ever walked this earth: they call forth our deepest needs, inspire confidence in ourselves, and impel us to nourish our soul with truth and beauty and love: they reveal the charm of a noble and heroic life: they kindle a desire for the strength and the delights of the good and the wise, and strengthen our will to *strive* for goodness and wisdom. If we will only put ourself in a receptive mood toward this *literature*, the whole human race will speak to us through Great Books. For the purposes of *correct* culture, Great Books surpass all the homes and the schools in the world, for they have power to exalt beyond all other powers known to man. There is only *one* escape from being always a very *limited* creature — to know the best of the

thoughts and the feelings of the *supreme* souls of the world, through *companion*-friendship with Great Books: it is only the men who have a large acquaintance with them and a deep abiding friendship for them that are able *manfully* to deal with *man*like and *God*like things. We can never get *broad* culture from a *narrow* circle: for this *broad* culture, we must lay hold of the Great Books with both hands; and we shall find them interesting and profitable *wherever* we shall touch them. Without the depth and the breadth and the genuineness which we get in so large a measure from friendship with the Great Books, a man's *best* work can in these days never come out of him. Those who browse among Great Books are seldom the slaves of the *gross* passions, for the Great Books set the intellectual atmosphere in vibration and stir the heart. Through Great Books, we get an ever-widening meaning and beauty in life; they are as essential in the building a *real* man as lactation, denti-

tion, and puberty. With the Great Books as our companion-friends, we proceed through life with an open and receptive soul, with increasing hospitality for each new thought and feeling, with an ever-firmer faith in God and man, in conscience and in duty. "We go to them first," says Ruskin, "for clear sight; then we abide with them as friends because of their just and mighty emotions."

And all these things is what Great Books, or *literature*, shall do for us when careful and complete culture of head and heart have made us *capable* of understanding their marvelous messages. "The Great Books grind no corn for the body; they weigh only as thistle-down in the great *business*-scales of life; but they lift the soul to higher realms, and it is as important to keep the *soul* alive as to keep the *body*—it is *soul*-life that gives all its value to *body*-life." Cato's advice to consort only with the best is *especially* good advice as to book-associates: the *common* books may afford *enjoyment*, if we are cheap

enough to wish for anything so plebeian as *mere* enjoyment; but it is only the books called *literature* — the Great Books — that can enrich our life: the books that inspire and enforce are far more needful than those that instruct and amuse — a man's book-company is an index of his soul.

But the Great Books are not for everybody: there are only few who learn the highest use of books even after *life*long study; there are fewer men in college who are capable of qualifying in literature-courses, than in anything else. The *high* things of life are perceptible only by those who have climbed to high places through the *education* of their *soul*-powers — more of us seem to be reaching for the high *sensualities* than for the high *spiritualities!* In these days of innumerable schools and colleges, there are few who have so educated head and heart that they are able to grasp the import of even *one* Great Book. The Great Books are only for souls that are akin to the men whose thought and love

have made them; they are sources of wisdom only for those whom observation and experience and reflection and education have made wise. Ruskin says that the Great Books are the gateway to a great city of sleeping kings who will wake for us and talk to us if we only know the incantation of *heart* that shall awake them. Without this *heart*-incantation, we may open their marble entrance-gates, and wander among these old kings in their repose, and finger the robes they lie in, and stir the crowns upon their heads; but they shall have no message for us. Just to *know* the message of these great kings and to be able to profit by their message is worth more than all the labor of a *life*time of *soul*-education in preparation — more than all things else, Great Books, or *literature*, inspires us for the highest possibilities of head and heart and character; and they are *powerful* spurs to heroic life: they impel us to *be* and to *become*, to *dare* and to *do*.

IV

BOOK-GATHERING

THE company we keep among *men* is not always an index of our character-equipment, for this is not always a matter of *choice;* but a man's bookshelves are always an index of what he is. There is no man who provides for people, so valuable to the world as he who makes a great book; and next to him is the man who buys it for himself, and takes it as a friend and companion of his leisure. There is a dignity of culture which lives only in the atmosphere of a library: it leaves its mark upon the cultured, just as eating and drinking and the other sensualities leave their marks upon the voluptuary. The greatest books are within the reach of all; "and we may put Parnassian singing-birds within our chambers, to cheer us with the sweetness of their songs." As there are none more enviable than the *poor* man who has gath-

ered about him a few of the *vital* books, and has lived with them until they have transformed his soul — so there is none so pitiable as the poor *rich* man who lives barren in some great bookless house.

A *wise* man's treasures are cased in leather covers, not locked in iron coffers. A book contains food inexhaustible; it is a provision for life, and for the *best* of life: therefore it is a *duty* to *own* them. "We call ourselves a rich nation," says Ruskin; "yet we are *filthy* enough to handle each other's books out of circulating-libraries!" Many a thoughtful man has maintained that the book which is not worth *buying* is not worth *reading*. As society refines, books become more necessary, and the taller they grow in the esteem of manly men. Next to acquiring friends-that-*are*-friends, the best acquisition is books-that-*are*-books; indeed, no *human* friendship can ever surpass that of book-friends in our library, through which our head and heart and character and abil-

ity to serve the higher needs of others have been lifted to loftier levels: books as well as *friendship* mean *enrichment* of life, or they mean nothing — every real man's life is spent in the search for worthy books to live with, as well as in the search for friendship. Were the home-libraries of America emptied of all but *choice* books, there should be an intellectual and an emotional awaking throughout the length and the breadth of the nation.

The dining-room and the library are the two most essential rooms in every home: the one provides work-stuff for the body; the other provides work-stuff for the soul. For *right* health and growth, the library is as indispensable as the dining-room — perhaps we all should be healthier and happier and longer-lived for *less* dining-room and *more* library: there's many a fat paunch with a *lean* head and heart and character and service for others. We seem sedulous about digging our grave with our teeth, instead of

building ever more stately mansions for the soul through wholesome thought and feeling. A house is a *home* only when its library is as regularly and as eagerly frequented as its dining-room; and the quality of the home is to be measured by the quality of the food-service of the library. Dr. Holmes assures us that quality-*eating* is an essential element in the evolution of a gentleman; and all the world of *thoughtful* men assure us that quality *library*-food is equally essential. A library is the very soul of a home: a house without it is just a *house*, never a *home*. Every well-ordered, cultured household numbers some of the kingly dead within its family, who are on intimate friendly terms with the *living* members of the household; and there might be fewer gloomy dyspeptics as well as more leisure for physicians if some of the *over*-time spent in the dining-room were given over to these kingly dead and to their influences.

A library is a perennial fountain of re-

freshment and instruction and wisdom; it is a sober chamber where true men take counsel of the good and the heroic and the wise that have passed on before them. A library *may* not be an essential for salvation, although there are men galore who believe that in these days a *full* life is impossible without access to bookshelves; it *may* not be essential for what the world calls *business*-success, which much too often means simply getting money together by-hook-or-by-crook; but a library *is* essential for bringing forth the best of American manhood, and *this* is the manhood about which Americans are primarily concerned — without *library*-influences, we Americans shall go stoop-shouldered and limping through life, and help to frustrate the destiny of our nation. To be a *patriotic* American is no child's-play; it is an *every*day task and a *lifelong* task to bring forth the *best* of our *individuality*. To evolve one's self into a creditable American manhood demands that we keep daily

pumping fresh emotions into ourself; and whoever is intimately associated with the best and the wisest that live in books is the man who is likeliest to do this pumping: few of us ever get the best out of ourselves without high-class company.

Time graduates a man from school and college, but *never* from his library—it is the workshop of a *gentleman* as well as the workshop of a scholar; the gentleman that is made without library-influences is flimsy stuff, and does not *wear* well. There is always a dignity of culture and an elegance which grows up only in the soil and atmosphere of a library—and how little the din of the stupid world ever enters the soul and disturbs the quietude of him who feeds upon the dainties that are served in a library! We make far too little of books in this busy world of ours, except for *show*-purposes; we lose our poise in business and politics, and too often prefer the muddy stream of idle gossip of newspapers and magazines rather than the

converse of the best and greatest discoverers and creators! Unless we become broad and deep enough to discover the value of books, we must remain forever inferior, and shall never attain insight into the truth and beauty of life — it is book-lack that does so much to make manikins of what was intended for *man*-stuff. The man with a soul is always at home in a library; but coarser heads and hearts demand material things to set them in motion — not books: "the *true* man is in Paradise among his books; the swineherd is happier among his pigs." A soul sinks or rises to the level of its book-environment and book-society. To a true man, a house without books is as dark and dreary as a house without windows; if we knew our *truest* needs, we should prefer to be carpetless than bookless — the books that the bookless man scorns are the reverberators and the reflectors and the telescopes of soul-life, and they have no substitutes; it is only the man who has never owned and

never used a library that sneers at books and booklovers.

Right-living demands spiritual as well as physical exercise: if we took more of the spiritual, perhaps we should not require so much of the physical. The man who is buried all day long in work which exercises his body to the full does not think about his head-and-heart exercise after his day's work is done, and wears himself out in trivialities and dissipations which make even a greater draft upon his energies than his work. A library is especially needful for the workingman: it shall be the good angel that shall hallow his home—not only a source of consolation to him, but a source of power and happiness: it shall lift him from the drudgery of the day, and take him away from base company; it shall give him the close companionship of good and *fine*-thinking men; while his body is getting its needed rest, his soul shall be working and growing. For a few cents, the workingman can have as

nightly companions the greatest of the philosophers and poets, of the scientists and story-tellers. To allow the library its share of the outfit of a household and also its portion of the yearly expenses is a *duty*—a *grave* duty. There is an enrichment which comes even from living where there are books, and it is more to human purposes to haunt the bookshop than the furniture-shop. The plainest row that paper or cloth ever covered shows nobler spirit than the most elaborately-carved furniture or the most exquisite *go-carts*, whether equipage or automobile or airplane. In any household, the presence of books is elevating, and their absence contributes to the vulgarity of its inmates. As our views of life become clearer, we perceive how much a library helps us to get farther from animal appetites, and closer to the divine that lives within us. Books are not furniture, but nothing else so beautifies a home. Nothing can ever be so *homeless* as a bookless house, except the house whose books

show vulgar conceptions of life: a collection of ephemeral books is as far away from a library as a collection of time-tables and telephone directories. We should so collect our library, that we shall never find any guest within our walls who shall be comparable to the guests that sit upon our bookshelves.

Like riches and learning, the value of a man's book-gathering depends chiefly upon what he does with his books. There are times when we need books just for soul-*refreshment;* but we must never lose sight of their *chief* use, which is for soul-*growth* and soul-*enrichment.* What we *especially* require in books is neither quantity nor fine bindery nor rarities nor *first*-editions, but the *best* that has ever been thought and known by man, and all this thought and knowledge expressed in *rarest* style: it is only books of *this* sort that contribute to spiritual-growth —it is only when each stone is a gem that increase in *number* is increase in *beauty.* Dil-

ettantism is almost as much out of place in a library-builder as the extemporizing-faculty is out of place in the pulpit.

A mere collection of books is *not* a library —a bookshop is a collection of books. A library is an *organism* that develops with the soul of its owner; it is furnished *progressively* as his spiritual-life progresses. He has the wisest and the best as his library-company, and he keeps on good terms with them: they aid and direct him, they counsel and console. He is not fastidious as to the raiment of his books, whether they are clad in paper or in cloth, in Morocco or in Russia; he is not especially concerned whether they are *first*-editions or *last*-editions, whether some distinguished man owned them before he got them, whether they carry some famous autograph or book-plate: the *amenities* of *his* book-gathering spring from his having only those books with windows open on all sides to the endlessness of human life and human history. There are men who are

book-buyers, and cultured gentlemen who buy books; and they differ widely: the quality of a library depends upon who fills the shelves—like every other kind of gathering-occupation, book-gathering may decline from a *soul*-occupation to a mere sensuality.

A *real* man's library is not *made*, it *grows*; he does not measure or number his books, he *weighs* them: he gains them as he gains his friends — one-by-one. The books he gathers are not always those the professional book-gatherer seeks, not always those the wise or the would-be-thought-wise commend; but those that supply the peculiar hungers and thirsts of his own soul. His library is conspicuous for *quality* rather than for quantity: his book-gathering he considers as a strictly *personal* matter; and he has, perhaps, a repugnance to being *famed* for his books or his book-plates. It requires only a few shelves to contain all the books that have done the most to enrich the souls of men. It does not signify culture or literary

taste to have many well-laden bookshelves: the parvenu often has these, all richly arrayed in rare bindings; but he has them mainly for vulgar display. A small library yearly growing larger with worth-while books is an honorable part of any one's belongings. A large library oftener distracts than refines or delights; a scanty library is always an advantage if it helps a man to nobler thoughts and feelings, which ought to be the only motive for an honest man's reading: when life is so fleeting, it is wicked to devote one's self to pastime, or to getting a reputation as a mere reader, or to some hobby in relation to books.

A man's enjoyment of his library shall be proportionate to the extent to which it is his own creation. The *truest* owner of a library is he who has bought each book for the sheer love he bears it. The safest creator of a library is he who has a taste for books; yet, as Lowell says, the man is not to be sneered at who buys books without knowing what they are

about, for he has made a start in the right direction and is likely ultimately to become a booklover as well as a book-buyer — we need not care what motive urges the *beginning* of book-gathering so long as there *is* a beginning; it is a far more commendable way to spend money, than to spend it in various gauds and sensualities: the reading of even the *backs* of the books in a library is a discipline in the right direction; and buying more books than one can read is only the soul's reaching out for better and bigger things, and it is just this *reaching* that helps to raise us above the beasts.

The bibliomane indiscriminately *buys* books; the bibliotaph *keeps* his books under lock-and-key; the bibliophile *loves* books, and is the only man who gathers books and forms a library through sheer love. There are few bibliophiles at the start, but many a bibliomane has become a bibliophile at the finish. Although there is nothing else that so beautifully furnishes a house, books

are for *use;* so, we should have no books so fine that we cannot use them. It is prudent to have minor books of the library in cheap covers, but to have all the *permanent* books well-printed and well-bound. Bindings should be cheerful, but plain: gilt grows tawdry. To a booklover, slovenly binding is as offensive as slovenly writing; and to write in a slovenly way is an insult to the reader, and perhaps an injury to him. Have only *useful* things that are *beautiful* was Robert Morris's rule in house-furnishing: and this may not be far astray in library-furnishing. "A book-plate gives a book a status which it could not otherwise have had; whenever we see a book with the owner's book-plate, we treat it with especial consideration, for it carries its owner's certificate." Above all others, we must have the poets upon our bookshelves; they are always the *king*-guests in a library: bookshelves without a poet resemble a garden without a flower; and our attending schools

shall have brought us little for life-service, if it has not equipped head and heart to understand the poets' messages, and the will to get all the poetry out of life that it is brimful of.

Of all the opportunities now offered Young America, the most precious is the opportunity to buy books; and, in these days of schools and colleges, it is a marvel that any young American should have a disrelish for books or neglect to cultivate a taste for them. A few cents' outlay can get almost any one of the *vital* books, and children should be encouraged to gather them: Lowell says, "When the volumes are his own, a youth may mark the passages that most impress him, and live with them until he prizes them as he does the familiar things which he associates with noble thoughts and gentle emotions. If a boy makes himself master of *one* vital book, he shall never become a commonplace man, for the virtue of a higher life shall have been infused into his

own life through this one vital book of which he has become master." It is a duty to help children to know how to use a library: they shall soon love the books as friends, and rude company shall disgust them. A library is one of the most precious things man has ever designed, and wisely gathering a library is second only to making a book that shall be fit reading for the good and the wise — library-makers are the authorets of the world, and stand second in honor to authors.

V

BOOK-READING

It is within our power to know and to love the best that has ever been written, and thus to become a means to enlarge the views and lift the aims of others — and *this* is Godlike work. We put our *hands* to work that we may *live;* we put *head* and *heart* to work mainly that life may be *worthy:* we cease to be *believers* and *lovers* and become only *partial* men whenever we become *engrossed* in the work of our hands, or in merely getting a *living*, or in piling up material things for the numberless sensual enjoyments. It is chiefly through *reading* that the majority of us can ever have that intercourse with *superior* men, which is the *supreme* essential for soul-growth — all *de*velopment implies *en*velopment. Refinement as well as scholarship comes from strong-bookmindedness, as Wordsworth calls it. *Right*-reading is a

preparation for some worthy *life*-activity, and only that reading helps which puts us in a *working*-mood. The longest life of the greatest industry shall not cover even a *hundredth* part of the *great* books of *instruction* and *inspiration*, and it is inexcusable slaughter of time to accustom one's self to read *inferior* books: to be unable to read is not nearly so shameful or so dreadful as to read *only* inferior books — reading *must* be a *soul*-exercise, rarely a relaxation.

Every *expanding* mind finds that he gets more inspiration from his *reading*, than he gets from his most cultured friend. Whoever reads rightly may not become saint or sage or hero, but he shall *never* become *ignoble*. The wise and the good of every nation have heaped up treasures for him; he is an inheritor of everything that has been discovered by labor or created by genius, and his reading lets him into the soul of these laborers and creators and opens to him both the secrets and the treasures of his *own* soul.

Persistent devotion to the ideals we get from books brings increased power to think and to serve, to believe in the goodness and the greatness of life, and to have an ever-increasing interest and delight in life. Ability to read rightly admits us to the whole world of thought and imagination, to the company of saint and hero and poet; it gives us an intimate acquaintance with the wisest and the wittiest at their wisest and wittiest moments; it broadens vision and deepens self-knowledge, and makes us yearn for self-improvement and the development of our individuality; it dignifies the everyday-details of life, turns home into a perennial refuge and solace, and compensates us for having to live so much amid the *commonplace* with which our daily life is surrounded. The noble are moved only by what ministers to soul-*growth* and soul-*power;* it is only silliness and shows and other sensualities that can captivate the *ig*noble. To the *thoughtful* man, reading is only a *means*, never an *end;*

how *many* books he reads does not concern him, but *what* and *how* he reads. Whoever is seeking for truth and beauty and happiness and knowledge and wisdom *must* make himself a reader-of-books. It is the habitual narrowness of the bookless man that prevents him from realizing that books are intended for our illumination and soul-guidance and delight: whatever else he may be, the man without the culture which comes from wise and intimate intercourse with books is narrow and unintelligent.

Right-reading is *soul*-traveling through regions more varied and attractive and *health*-giving than all that can be had from a *life*time of *world*-wandering. Of all the occupations that are known to man, there is none so dignified as *right*-reading and none so wasteful as *wrong*-reading: when everything else fails, we can trust the service and the companionship of books; better than any *living* society, they help us to know and to cherish the *divine* germ that lives in each

of us, and to produce the Godlike both *within* and *without* ourself. The *right*-reading habit brings high thought, tender heart, and an ever-enlarging acquaintance with human-nature; it transforms into repose and delight those many *weary* hours that thrust themselves into each one's life; it gives catholicity, spiritual strength, and moral muscle. There is no other means of pleasure and profit that costs so little and lasts so long: when *real* books have become our teachers and companions, we walk through life with wide-open eyes and a receptive soul; and, better than any other teachers and companions, they help us to purer and higher tastes in nature, art, literature, and conduct. The man of purpose carries away from each reading either something to rouse his fancies in a leisure hour, or something to gird him in adversity. Centuries ago St. Basil said that, in the combat which men must sustain, they *must* be fortified by history and philosophy and poetry.

A man should read to *live*, not live to *read:* there is a gulf between book-inquiry and book-curiosity. Reading must give the soul its *work*-stuff, must give additional life and nourishment, must enable us to sound the depths of our own *self;* else, it is mainly idleness. We are noble not because we *read* many books, but because we *apply* them. Much reading and little thinking *weakens* the mind; but little reading and much thinking brings *light* and *power:* it has been said that he is wise who reads fifteen minutes and thinks forty-five minutes about it. Lowell says that every book we read must be made a round in the ever-lengthening ladder by which we climb to knowledge, and to that soul-*serenity* and that soul-*temperance* which is the richest and the sweetest fruit of culture; but that these can be reached only by reading the books that make us think, and by reading them so that they shall make us *able* to think. Large-*reading* is as irrelevant as large-*eating:* it is thought

and digestion and assimilation that make books serviceable. The man who reads *rightly* never reads as a cold and blind book worm or with scientific-greed or pedant-pride or critic-art; he reads to please himself and to serve his soul. Reading never profits unless it is a *pleasure*, for whatever is a *labor* to read is never retained—the first requirement is to read what shall appease our desires or satisfy our wants. Every book we read should excel us in intellectual and moral strength, and we should always prefer the books which *start* ideas rather than those which *put* ideas —prefer those that give *power* rather than those that give *light* and relaxation. A wise reader shuns a badly-written book—the book-viands that are badly-served may be as harmful as those that are badly-cooked: if a thought is worth expressing, the writer owes it to the reader to set it in fitting word and phrase. To read only *well*-written books is a marvelous aid in language-culture: an awkward, careless, badly-written book is an

insult and a hindrance to the reader; the richer the thought, the richer the setting should be. What we *like* to read is not nearly so important as what we *ought* to read: whatever *our* reading tastes may be, we must never forget that there is a *best*, and that the best is always the most *serviceable*.

The reading-*habit* is acquired by reading just what we *want* to read and just *when* we want to read it—harness may be good for the maturer mind, but the *free*-pasture is essential for the beginner: he should be turned loose to browse at random, yet helped to accustom himself always *first* to have a good try at the *best*. It should be a principle of every reader to use the kind of mind-*food* that brings the right kind of mind-*growth*. If a book is beyond our understanding, we should drop it at once, and wait until our spiritual strength shall enable us to carry it; and we should be honest enough to say that it *is* beyond us. The very *best* books, like the very best people, cannot always please,

for the soul is not always craving that sort of food. Each must find for himself the book he needs: there may be no message for him in the book that the world calls *great;* let him keep up his courage, continue to seek and to read, and in time he shall find *some* writer who shall fill his heart and open visions of new worlds to his wondering eyes —no two writers have the same message or can ever make the same appeal.

Reading is not a business for a soul-*sluggard:* it is a labor to which every faculty must be awake and active. "To read true books in a true spirit," says Thoreau, "is a noble exercise, and one which shall task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem: it requires a training such as athletes underwent, and almost a *lifelong* steady attention to this object." Right-*reading* is as difficult to learn as the art of right-*living* — the great Goethe said, "I have been fifty years learning how to read, and have not yet succeeded." Be-

fore we can *read* rightly, we must acquire the habit of *looking* and *seeing:* Dr. Johnson said that some men can see more while riding ten miles upon a stage-coach in England, than others can see from traveling all over Europe — he who would bring *back* the riches of The Indies must carry *out* the riches of The Indies. We are told that some readers are like jelly-bags; they let all pass that is good, and retain only the impure and the refuse: that some are like sponges; they suck up all and give it back, only a little dirtier: that some are like the sands of the hour-glass; their reading runs in and out, and leaves no trace behind it: that just a few are like the workers in the Golconda Mines; they retain the gold and the gems, and cast aside the dirt and the dross. There are some readers who enjoy without judgment, and some who judge without enjoyment; but the true reader enjoys while he judges, and judges while he enjoys. Observation, thought, and *reading* are three *manhood-*

essentials: reading and thought without *observation* begets a bookworm; reading and observation without *thought* begets the intellectual busybody; observation and the thought it may awake without *reading* may beget shrewdness, but it never begets *breadth*. Every book that is read *without* a purpose is an opportunity lost to read a book *with* a purpose; and to skim a book as it is our duty to skim a newspaper is to harm our faculties permanently. As we cannot fathom the wealth of life there is in a true man by occasional conversations with him, so we never can appreciate the worth of a true book just by reading it: we must study it, learn to know it as we know a friend, and return to it again-and-again with expectant and joyous heart just as we return to those we love—right-*reading* comes perilously near *studying*. "I love not those who skim dippingly over the surface of a page as swallows over a pool before rain: by such no pearls are found; if there be no pearls, let

us hope that an oyster or two may reward adequate perseverance; if there be no pearls or oysters, yet is patience itself a thing worth diving for." Ruskin says that the court of the kingly dead is open only to merit and to labor, that no vile or vulgar person can enter there; that, if we want to be the companions of these kings, we must make ourself *kingly;* that if we long for the conversation of the wise, we must learn to understand it and we shall hear it; that we must rise to the level of their thoughts if we would be gladdened by them, must share in their feelings if we would recognize their presence. In the realm of books to him that *has* shall be given; and he who has not the power through the culture of his spiritual-faculties, though he may yearn to understand *Plato*, shall quickly return to his *newspaper*.

We must read *much*, but not *many* books: the soul must not be a *vessel*, but a *vat*. To get at the *heart* of books, we must live *with* and *in* them. The real book is a strong

tincture—to be taken drop-by-drop, not gulped down by the bottle. As the body assumes only the *fine* essence of the food it consumes, so a *right*-reader takes and makes his own only a very small part of what he reads: the virtue of each book must sink into the soul, and become a *living* and *generative* force. Both books and men talk better to us when we talk back to them; and it is better never to see a book, than to be warped by it out of our orbit and become a *satellite* instead of a *system*.

Every reader must learn the art of *judicious* skipping—in these days, whole libraries may be skipped; even the *worthy* books that we decide to read have large portions which do not concern us in the least, and shall be forgotten the day after we read them: "as the fairest fruit-tree is chiefly *wood*-bearing, breaking out here and there into fragrant blossom and delicious fruit, so even the very *best* books are mostly *dull* matter, where at *intervals* heavenly truth

kissed by the sun of genius buds and blossoms into perfect form." Lowell thought that we should choose *one* great writer and become thoroughly familiar with him; and he reminds us that to understand *perfectly* and weigh *exactly* one *vital* book, we shall be gradually and pleasantly persuaded to excursions and explorations that we little dreamt of when we began, and shall find ourself a scholar and an educated man before we are aware. One may browse in many fields if his digestion and assimilation are good; but the *supreme* books of life must form the *background* of every life of thought and study.

Wrong-reading — To be open to *every* book is to gain nothing from *any* book. The book-*hungry* man crams himself with materials that do him no good: it is the lumber put to use that is valuable; the insatiable reader almost always reads with least profit. Desultory reading is very mischievous: it fosters habits of loose, disconnected

thoughts; it makes a sewer of the intellect through which *any* thoughts may flow; it causes *mind*-wandering, which is the foe to culture; it breeds inattention, which is a faculty that needs most care. "Except as conscious pastime," says Lowell, "desultory reading hebetates the brain, and weakens the bow-string of will; it communicates as little intelligence as the messages that run along the telegraph-wires do to birds perched upon them." Hasty, omnivorous swallowing of books causes soul-dyspepsia as surely as thoughtless gluttony ruins digestion. Blackie says that desultory reading resembles a little dog running about a lawn: he sniffs at everything, but catches nothing. The mere *bookworm* is the most useless of useless men; book-dissipation and physical drunkenness lead to debauchery. The head that is a sieve through which every book-decoction is drained retains only the refuse. A man may be a devourer of books, yet incapable of reading a hundred lines of the

wisest and most beautiful. If you read ten pages of a book with accuracy, says Ruskin, you are forever in some measure an educated man; and Thoreau says that a book should be read as deliberately as it is written. Who sips of *many* arts drinks *none;* still, we should *dread* the man who reads only *one* book or one *kind* of book, for he is sure to be one-sided and unreasonable.

Reading for *amusement* is an occupation for the most stagnant moments of life and for the *lazy*-soul. Whoever reads for amusement soon becomes averse to the continuous application which is essential to get full benefit from *serious*-reading and he soon becomes averse to continuous application of *any* kind —he grows lazy-*bodied* as well as lazy-*souled*, and is utterly unfitted for *any* duty which he assumes. Reading is not always a commendable occupation: it may spring from vanity or indolence or from a fondness for what is frivolous and sensational; it may also be a disease or the indulgence of mor-

bid propensities, like that dreadful disease of haunting moving-picture resorts, which is so prevalent among the *little*-souled people. The effects of inferior reading are the same as the effects from associating with superficial and inferior people—it wastes time, enfeebles discernment, dulls intellectual edge, prevents us from ever appreciating any of the excellent things of life: few have ever risen even to *mediocrity* whose time has been devoted to inferior reading.

Newspapers and *magazines* are mainly idle things for the idle hours of idle people; to read them properly is one of the supreme acts of presence-of-mind. They are mainly as soulless as the syndicates that publish them, and the chances are ten-to-one that they shall waste our time or mislead us, or both. Newspapers purvey the news of the entire world, and they are the only bridge that so *many* millions will ever use over the Gulf of Ignorance; yet, far too often they are pickers of gossip and scandal, searching

the gutters and the garbage-barrels of the world for every unclean and tainted scrap of mishap and misdoing. In every newspaper there is a *bit* that we *should* read; the art is to find this bit, and to waste no time with the rest. Ability to be pleased with the best depends upon intimate acquaintance with the best; hence, we must confine our reading to the *best*, and read the newspapers mainly by *headlines*—those who handle filth shall get dirty fingers. The magazines seem to be the chosen reading of the throng, and they leave them as they find them—mainly unintelligent and unfeeling; the knowledge they give is fragmentary, and often untrue; and they teach the throng just enough to make them talkative about what they are far from comprehending: what leaves us unmoved leaves us unimproved.

The *light-reading*-habit!! It is as fatal to culture as the eating-habit is to health and longevity. Heads that are fed upon it become flabby, frivolous, and illogical. It ut-

terly debilitates and corrupts the mind for wholesome *life* as well as for wholesome *reading;* it throws us into foolish or vicious company, dissipates our spirits, sullies our faith in God and man, makes our talk frothy and puerile, and leaves us incapable ever of associating with manly men or womanly women. Those who are too weak in head to bear the fatigue of *thinking* always resort to newspapers, magazines, or flashy-fiction. Anything like an honorable life is impossible for those addicted to reading for amusement or to *light*-reading, because such reading makes their adherents incapable of *admiration* and *reverence* and *seriousness*, which are three virtues found in every *worthy* man and woman. The head and heart that have been relaxed by fiction that lacks even intellectual fiber are in sad condition to meet the perils and the requirements of life. The *religious* story-books are hardly fit reading for self-respecting Christians—they are generally feeble in thought, slovenly in

style, goodish in sentiment, and untrue in portraying human-nature. To keep the company of periodicals and light-fiction is to live in the *crowd;* and in the crowd it is impossible to retain self-respect, which is the very foundation of virtue. It is only the intellectual loafer and the moral paralytic that lolls over the trash and the filth of cheap fiction: newspapers and magazines have their important place in the world; but light-reading has nothing for anybody but distraction, dissipation, and debauchery. Debilitating waste of head and heart in aimless, promiscuous, vapid reading in the poisonous exhalations of book-garbage—*this* is *mis*use of reading, the *sin* of it. So much of the shallow conceit and the opinionated infallibility which prevails to-day is attributable quite as much to inferior-reading as to the smattering of the school-mills. Ruskin says that when we have learned to read *rightly*, we shall gradually attach less weight to our *own* opinions, shall perceive that *our* thought

upon *any* subject is not the clearest and wisest, and that what *we* think of a subject is of *small* importance — that we have no material from which to *build* an opinion on any *serious* subject at all: we shall soon become convinced that on *serious* matters we have no *right* to think — only to try to *learn* truths and facts. This lesson in *humility* from *right*-reading is one of its richest returns: launch not beyond your depth, and mark that place where your power and knowledge leave off and your impotence and ignorance begin.

The *public*-libraries!! When eighty per cent of the books they distribute is inferior fiction full of fribbles and oddities and monstrosities, a public-library is anything but a public-benefit! We need to be taught how to use a library just as much as we need to be taught correct business life or domestic life: through lack of being taught *what* book-food to use and *how* to use it, almost all the public-library patrons have weak

book-stomachs able to digest nothing stronger than the insipid society-novel, and nothing purer than the mud of newspapers and magazines.

VI

BOOK-MAKING

If *spiritual* and *moral* life count for nothing, then those who provide food and shelter and pastime, clothing and commodities and comforts are the most important men in the world; if the greatest thing in the world is the power to enlighten the souls and refine the tastes of the people, then we owe almost everything on this side of barbarism to *book-makers*— they are guides and inspirers, and their life is a glorious service; in the regeneration of humanity, they count beyond all others. "I for one shall never be persuaded," says Lowell, "that Shakespeare left a less-useful legacy than did Watt by his invention of steam-power: the tenants of the imagination afford all the *deepest* and the *highest* satisfactions in life. Nature shall keep up the supply of what are called

hard-headed men without our help; but there are other uses for heads quite as good as those at the end of the world's battering-rams."

A *true* writer looks upon his art as a *religion*, and he is rewarded only when he has *bettered* his readers. He is *strong*-minded and *right*-minded, with a soul that sets in motion the soul of others; and he does *worthy* work because he is *thoroughly* sincere to himself. He writes simply and spontaneously *only* about those things that he is *fullest* of and *best* understands; he holds it his *business* to utter wholesome truth, not to seek readers or renown or returns in money. His habit of expression leads him to search for something to express; hence, his life is one of intense and incessant labor; he is a ceaseless thinker, and always solicitous to renew his mind with fresh knowledge and new thought; he ransacks a thousand thought-mines for their gold and gems — like flower and fruit, every *real* book is the result of

culture, for nothing excellent is merely natural. Whatever *he* writes is produced by the gentle heat of incubation, for it is only the book that has had time enough to be properly *hatched* that has vitality enough to live and to serve: the writer of the moment is rarely the writer of the eternities; "he cackles oftener than he lays *real* eggs"—the less weight a pen and a race-horse carry, the faster they run.

The man who writes a book without a message wastes *his* time and *our* time. It is a writer's *chief* office to minister to *soul*-wants: that writer is always the *most* helpful to mankind whose book is a rock to build life upon. It is only from books written in uttermost sincerity by men of love and sympathy that we can get *instruction* and *inspiration* and proper *recreation*, which are the only justifiable ends for reading at all. The base writer destroys both good taste and true culture; and the enthusiastic writer with little or no capacity is a dangerous man. It

is dishonest for a writer to claim an audience before he has something *real* to say and before he has put it into the best form that is possible for *him*, for bad art in a writer is bad morals — he should drink deep in preparation, or let writing alone. It is not *quantity* that is demanded to-day, but the best that can be known and thought, and then expressed in richest form. For purposes of culture, the *artist*-side of a writer is almost as important as his *thought;* it is rich thought in rich expression that does most to help on spiritual-life — to keep the company of men and books that speak rich-cream English rather than the skim-milk of the street is the very best means for acquiring rich-cream expression: every writer is under bonds to readers.

Whoever writes to instruct and inspire must not expect many readers, for the greater number prefer gossip or amusement to wisdom. Whoever writes to amuse the masses shall have a myriad-audience, but

he shall rarely rise above the mountebank. To vulgarize humanity seems to be the mission of the low-bred writer: he is generally unscrupulous and debasing. It is with books as with life — wherever we turn, we come upon the incorrigible crowd swarming everywhere and damaging everything as flies in summer. The talented writer who employs his powers in propagating immorality and in seasoning vicious sentiments with his wit and humor shall have his day-of-reckoning. The best *entertainment* any writer can give is that which *lifts* our imagination and *lightens* our life-burdens, by taking us out of humdrum and sordidness for a time, so that we may see *ideal*, familiar life and see it more truly from the *artist*-writer's viewpoint. Almost all of us are encompassed by sad and sordid conditions; and whoever carries us far from these through his book into what is best and beautiful in life, both relaxes and refreshes us. Each day's experiences give us glimpses of how ill and how

vulgar men can be; and it is *always* refreshing to know the *romantic* truth.

Nature has inflicted barrenness upon many a mind which nevertheless has teemed with productions. Writing books is not a *trade*, but an *art* which demands peculiar powers and patient practice. All the true writers are *doers*, although they are people who seem to have nothing to do: nothing seems so fruitful in a writer as a fine gift for what common people call *idleness*. They say that the muses are jealous mistresses, and never lend their higher gifts to those who plunge very deep into the tumult of the world — both gods and muses as well as wise men hate those who do too much; and those who woo the muses must keep the even tenor of their way along the cool sequestered walks of life, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife. Dr. Holmes closed his portfolio for twenty-five years after his physician-life began, and opened it only after his professional standing was established; and Hawthorne, our

greatest romancer, was mute during his years of work-life at Salem, Boston, and Liverpool. It is different with *scholars:* a forge is not a convenient desk, yet Elihu Burritt learned there many of his thirty languages between the times when he was blowing his bellows in the service of his farmer-neighbors; the nursery is not the place one would choose for astronomical calculations, yet, beset by her children, whom she never neglected, Mary Somerville wrought out her "Mechanism of the Heavens," which put her into the first rank of contemporary scientists, and made her a member of The Royal Astronomical Society. It was not for nothing that Hawthorne, Charles Reade, Tennyson, Stevenson, and scores of others who have left their footprints spent years in apprenticeship to their art.

Making books as a means of making money has multiplied books for the sake of the writers rather than for the readers: whoever is thinking about the royalty of

his books will watch his fame rather than the welfare of his readers. Somebody says that there is always a metallic taste about a book written under the stimulus of so much money for so many words. Butler says it is a writer's duty to talk *up* to his auditors, not *down* to them. The writer who *sells* his talents finds it hard not to sink to the level of those whom he addresses. When writing becomes a *business*, the very power of contemplation becomes impaired and perverted: the true writer always writes first to *please* himself and to *relieve* himself, then to please and to elevate those who keep his company. Writing is always better for being an appendage to some other work — an *avocation* rather than a *vo*cation: Longfellow did not improve the *quality* of his work by quitting his professorship at Harvard and devoting himself exclusively to his art; Bryant's fifty years of busy life "drudging for the dregs of men," as he called it, did not mar from first to last the quality of the

art he manifested in "Thanatopsis," although it did reduce his annual output to seventy-five lines.

A *good* book need not necessarily be written by a man-of-letters: some wonderful books have been made by men who gave no special attention to book-making. Voracious students as well as habitual writers rarely make a book with vitality enough to live beyond its infancy, and great *thinkers* who write are seldom as serviceable as *thoughtful* men who write. Men-of-the-desk cannot touch the hearts of the *plain* people—it is only the *unbookish* folk who write from passion that ever do this: it is just because Rousseau could never write except from passion that he is the *mightiest* literary force of the eighteenth century, although he had neither great intellect nor great knowledge. The world's *great* books never come from a *bookish* people—almost all that they write is born to die; it is the nations that are *un*bookish in habits that have made the great books

— Greece gave Homer, England gave Shakespeare. The power to write *great* things is rarely an heirloom: "David, Isaiah, Homer, Æschylus, Horace, Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Schiller, Hugo, Béranger, Scott, Burns, Shelley, Byron transmitted not one spark of their genius to posterity."

Originality is the rarest of writer-qualities: almost all writers are echoes. Originality seems to be the art of "making what is *not* new appear to *be* new"—the art of pouring out of one bottle into another. Holmes says that writers are cannibals: they live upon each others' works. The striking passages of even the greatest writers are notable for the sameness of thought and sentiment, and the very finest passages of prose and poetry are often only the embellished recollections of other men's productions. "Genius always kindles its own fire, but it often does this from the electric-spark from some kindred soul." Even the most original writers have

acknowledged their obligations to the good things that were hived in other men's books, and they dipped without stint into their dainty honeycombs. The greatest book-making geniuses have been omnivorous readers, and their memories were hoops of steel that turned to good account all that they could hook up: Montaigne helped himself to thoughts in *every* direction, and confessed that he *weighed* his borrowings, but did not *number* them; Shakespeare and Goethe "milked other men's minds without reluctance," and used whatever suited their purposes wherever they found it, probably believing that a thought at last belongs to the man who best expresses it. Through their *style*, these borrowers gave *blood* and *color* to their borrowings; but their borrowings also gave an ever-charming complexion to what they wrote. Most profit and pleasure can be had from writers who make us *think* most; we are indifferent whether the silver and the gold they work in is newly-

dug from the earth, or is melted up from spoils. A *fresh* writer is generally worth reading, even if both his thought and knowledge are *reflective*. A writer need not lament his lack of originality, but he should have a horror of being dull.

A book may contain a hundred pages, and be ninety-nine pages too long: "the world has myriads of books wherefrom the longest-winded diver shall bring up no pearls, nothing but his handful of sand." It is in books the chief of all perfections to be *concise*, and artist-writers as rigorously remove all surplusage as sculptors remove all superfluous marble: it is not "a Xerxes-army of words but a compact Greek-ten-thousand that marches down safe to posterity"; Dean Swift says that, were all books reduced to their quintessence, many a bulky author should make his appearance in a penny-paper. It is only the man who utters deepest truth in fewest words that may hope to endure. Shakespeare says that brevity is the

soul of wit, and that an honest tale speeds best being plainly told. We may need a book for relaxation, but not too much of it; we may wish to know something about a subject, but not too much about it—with all Carlyle's keenness for the shortages of others, he never perceived his own shortage in taking a score of his books just to preach to the world the gospel of *silence!!* The writer who can pack a bookful in a sentence always does most towards helping his fellows to a happy life, and poets live because they learned this ennobling secret. To be concise is to be as rare as a genuine poet: Bacon is the only English master of concision, with Emerson as a good second. Emerson is the most stimulating of all the *American* writers because he has so admirably expressed in epigram so many excellent things; he is one of the very few writers of *any* age that can be read and re-read and always with an accession of light and power. Every *genuine* thought can be lifted out of its setting, and

shine with its own light; and the writers who have looked upon their art as a *religion* have striven to give their readers such thoughts. In one of his *Edinburgh Review* articles, Sydney Smith advises that men who write books should remember that longevity has been greatly diminished since The Deluge; that from seven or eight hundred years, before The Flood, life is now reduced to seventy or eighty years; that any man who writes without The Deluge before his eyes, and handles a subject as if men could lounge ten long years over a *pamphlet*, commits one of the most grievous wrongs against humanity. It may be far less dishonest to pick a man's pocket than to rob him of his *time*. It is the man who can tell it well and tell it so that those who run may read that always gets an audience that keeps awake; his audience is always glad to hear him, and they frequently revert to him.

A man's *character* has nothing to do with his writings: if we are searching for *vice*less

writers, we shall die with hardly one of those myriads of influences for good which come from books. It is the *good* in men that must be remembered; the sooner the perishable husk in which it has been enveloped is suffered to perish, the sooner we shall know them as they *really* are. The world's best and greatest men are often deluged with what the good *little*-people abhor as the *gravest* vices, for they are born with stronger passions than *plain*-people, and are tried by greater temptations. It is evidence of an *egregious* blockhead to heed the coarseness or sensuality or abjectness of the world's men of *greatest* accomplishment — the genius *may* acknowledge no law; still, he is both *wonderful* and *sacred*. The sensible man judges a writer just by his *writings*, never by his character. The world says that Rousseau was utterly abject, but he was a huge influence for good; it says that Byron was a bad man, but he was a great poet; it says that Bacon was venal, but he was a marvel-

ous thinker. There was much said and done at Mermaid Tavern which Puritans could not approve; but the world would be poorer to-day had it not been for Shakespeare and Jonson and their often *sack*-full boon-companions. Excellent morality may be taught by a man who has no morals at all, just as a beautiful stream may arise in a very impure fountain. Lowell asks what has the *conduct* of Shakespeare and Goethe and Burns to do with Genius. He says that genius is not a matter of character — that, like Aladdin's Lamp, it may be sordid in the externals; but we care nothing for this sordidness, if the touch of it can build palaces and make us rich as only those in Dreamland are rich.

THE END

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A

Z
992
.W73

46837

WILLIS

Bibliophily of Book Love

DATE	ISSUED TO

Z
992
.W73

46837

CO-DBR-926